

## EDITORIAL: Education, public safety are vital to Fresno's revitalization



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Much attention was placed on developer influence in Fresno's growth pattern in the weeks and days leading to the City Council's 5-2 approval of a general plan that will attempt to rebuild our urban core.

This attention was well deserved in light of the fact that local home builders — many of whom cared little about community stewardship — exerted great pressure on City Hall during a post World War II boom that saw Fresno's population explode from less than 100,000 to more than 509,000 today.

However, it is a gross oversimplification to solely blame home builders and their preference for developing on the fringes for the "Tale of Two Cities" reality that has resulted in blighted neighborhoods and an economically underperforming downtown.

It was the appeal of new subdivisions coupled with the free-fall of Fresno Unified School District and concerns about crime that drove middle-class families to north Fresno, Clovis and Clovis Unified School District. Rather than stand

and fight, families picked up and moved.

Who could blame them? They would be safer. And their children would be raised in a district that not only recognized the importance of education, but was investing in first-class campuses also designed as recreation hubs.

This is why the success of Fresno's new general plan will require Fresno Unified's continued rebound and a concerted City Hall effort to rebuild neighborhoods around schools receiving first-class upgrades from the district.

In addition, Mayor Ashley Swearingin and her successor, along with the City Council, must continue to make public safety a high priority. If people in older neighborhoods don't feel safe, they will leave as soon as they can afford to — regardless of whether there have been new infrastructure and public transportation improvements.

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Certainly the vicious attack of a 62-year-old man in broad daylight at the bus stop on Dec. 15 is a cause for concern and an example of the challenges that must be overcome for the new general plan to succeed.

The good news is, Fresno has a lot going for it. Employment is up. Fresno State President Joseph Castro is committed to making the university even more of a partner in helping transform the city for the better. And slowly but surely Fresno Unified is reducing the dropout rate and preparing more students to excel in college or the workplace.

We can make the new general plan work, but only if everybody is paddling in the same direction.

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